

The Only Good Wolf:
Hunting Culture and the Medieval Werewolf

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Abstract

Though werewolves are traditionally portrayed as rapacious and murderous even back to antiquity, several stories in the late twelfth century instead portray the werewolf in a sympathetic light: a chivalrous knight trapped through some deceit in the form of a wolf. Most modern scholarship interprets these unusual stories as representing medieval attitudes toward metamorphosis and hybridity, or as part of a wider cultural exploration of the boundary between human and animal. Little has been said, however, about the relationship between the sympathetic werewolf story and the increasing importance and popularity of hunting and pet-keeping during that same period. This paper redresses that gap by contextualizing three stories, “Bisclavret,” “Melion,” and “Arthur and Gorlagon,” within the broader medieval literary tradition of pet-keeping and hunting. This contextualization demonstrates that these werewolf stories are very much a reflection of medieval attitudes toward wolves and dogs. Examination of four key scenes appearing in each of these stories shows that the representation of the “tamed” werewolf in these stories parallels the representation of wolves and dogs found in a variety of contemporary sources including historical records, hunting manuals, ethnographies, hagiographical stories, bestiaries, and fables. Moreover, a close reading shows that the tamed (were)wolf is described in terms similar to those used to describe a well-behaved dog; and, in turn, the well-behaved dog is described in terms similar to those used to describe the ideal knight. The emphasis these stories place on the civility of the tamed werewolf therefore challenges traditional readings that stress the boundary these stories purportedly draw between human and animal; rather, these stories productively collapse those very boundaries.

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Introduction

The late twelfth century marked the beginning of a renewed interest in the werewolf story, so much so that Caroline Walker Bynum calls it a “werewolf renaissance” (94). More than renewed interest, the twelfth century also marks a change in the nature of the werewolf, which Marie de France conveniently suggests at the beginning of her lai, “Bisclavret”:

In the old days, people used to say—
And it often actually happened—
That some men turned into werewolves
And lived in the woods.
A werewolf is a savage beast;

While his fury is on him
 He eats men, does much harm,
 Goes deep in the forest to live.
 But that's enough of this for now;
 I want to tell you about the Bisclavret. (5-14)¹

With this passage Marie warns the reader that her story does not conform to the traditional werewolf story and expectations of a savage werewolf must be set aside. The Bisclavret (both a noun and a proper name) is not the werewolf of those other stories; in fact, he shares little in common with the traditional mythology of the werewolf at all. As the story unfolds, we find that Bisclavret is neither violent nor particularly frightening; he neither resents nor fears his wolf form; and he spends much of the story as the loyal companion to the king.² "Bisclavret" is perhaps the finest example of a collection of stories which appear during the high Middle Ages that feature what is commonly referred to in modern scholarship as the "sympathetic" werewolf: a protagonist who has been trapped in the form of a wolf through some deceit or betrayal, but,

¹ Jadis le poeit hume oïr / e sovent suleit avenir, / hume plusur garulf devindrent / e es boscages maisun tindrent. / Garulf, ceo est beste salvage; / tant cum il est en cele rage, / humes devure, grant mal fait, / es granz forez converse e vait. / Cest affaire les ore ester; / del Bisclavret vus vueil cunter. All quotations in Modern English from *The Lais of Marie de France*, translated by Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (New York: Dutton, 1978); all quotations in Old French from *The Lays of Marie de France*, translated by Edward J. Gallagher (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010).

² Of the three stories I will discuss, Bisclavret's docile nature is peculiar to "Bisclavret." The other two werewolves, Melion and Gorlagon, are quite violent, though their violence is with purpose and thus are still distinct from the traditional werewolf.

unlike the traditional werewolf who becomes a murderous creature and cannot control his violence, here the werewolf retains his human sense and reason.

Much of the academic focus on these stories has been on the "human sense and reason" of these werewolves, with the general claim being that these stories allow the werewolf to retain his reason in an attempt to ease the anxiety of losing one's humanity and to make the idea of transformation more palatable to a culture that opposed the very concept of change. Jeffrey Cohen (2012) argues that "Bisclavret" erases the fear of losing one's humanity completely, and replaces it with an "indifference" to both human and wolf that is nearly posthuman. Leslie Sconduto (2008) and Matthew Beresford (2013) both point to Church doctrine that states that metamorphosis of the kind that werewolves undergo is illusory or the product of dreams and not true metamorphosis, and suggest that stories such as "Bisclavret" attempt to tell tales of transformation while also adhering to orthodoxy by having the werewolf retain his reason. Bynum (2001) uses "Bisclavret" and other werewolf stories to support her assertion that twelfth-century scholars and artists struggled with the concept of change in general.

Unsurprisingly, these studies all discuss the sympathetic werewolf in terms of human versus wolf—the human mind versus the wolf's body—and leave unremarked how uncannily close the portrayal of "human sense and reason" in a wolf resembles the everyday behavior of a well-trained dog, particularly a hunting dog. Cohen comes closest to this observation, noting that Bisclavret "is at once like a favorite hunting dog and like a good household knight" (356), but does not explore the implications of this or the influences that makes this comparison possible. In fact, little has been said about the importance of dogs and hunting to the sympathetic werewolf story, and this paper seeks to redress that gap in the scholarship. Hunting culture and the stories and characteristics of dogs repeated in bestiaries, hunting manuals, ethnographies, and other

works of the period so inform these werewolf stories that critical moments in the plots echo sentiments and narratives that contemporary readers would have found quite familiar. I argue the emphasis these stories (and most scholars) place on the werewolves having the "mind of a man" is overstated, and what is really crucial to notice is the playing-out of a hunting metaphor where wildness is tamed and the wolf becomes the pet dog. To support this claim, I will examine three stories produced in the high Middle Ages: Marie de France's "Bisclavret," the anonymous "Lai of Melion," and the anonymous "Arthur and Gorlagon."³ I first show how the lore of hunting, wolves, and dogs found in bestiaries, fables, hunting manuals, and other historical documents of

³ "Bisclavret" is found in several existing manuscripts. Hanning and Ferrante base their translation upon MS Bibliothèque nationale, nouv. acq. fr. 1104, while Gallagher uses the Old French text found from British Library Harley 978. Hanning and Ferrante suggest the lais were written by 1170 (7). "Arthur and Gorlagon" is taken from Day's translation based upon the text found in Oxford Bodleian Rawlinson MS B 149. Day conveniently offers both the Latin and English translation side by side. Though the manuscript is fourteenth century, Day suggests that the story was composed at the end of the twelfth century, though she admits the evidence for this conclusion is slight (43). "Melion" is found in Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 3516, f. 343r. col. 1 through 344r, col 4. Hopkins supplies both the Old French and English translation side by side and offers Prudence Tobin's dating of the lai at sometime between 1190 and 1204 (9). A fourth text, *Guillaume de Palerne*, is also considered a sympathetic werewolf story. I do not discuss it here as its plot is quite different from the aforementioned texts, though for an excellent discussion, see Sconduto (2008). Also, see the story of "Biclarel" found in *Roman de Reynart le Contrefait*, which most believe to be a later (and lesser) version of "Bisclavret," a discussion of which can be found in Hopkins (2005).

the period helped to define the treatment of the werewolf in these stories. Then, having established that these stories are as much about dogs (or *doggishness*) as they are about wolves, I revisit the idea that the tame werewolves found in these stories ease the anxiety over the possibility of losing one's humanity, and suggest instead that the closeness between humans and dogs (or the wolf portrayed as a dog) only changes the tone of that anxiety, but does not remove it. Reading these stories with that context in place allows us to see these stories as part of an existing medieval dialog about hunting, wolves, and dogs, and adds new and interesting facets to our understanding of medieval human/animal distinctions.

The Twelfth-century Werewolf and the Hunting Metaphor

"Bisclavret," "Melion," and "Arthur and Gorlagon" all share the same general plot: a man is trapped in the form of a wolf through his wife's treachery, but he keeps his human mind. He lives for a time in the forest as a wolf but is eventually hunted. To save his life, he throws himself at the mercy of a wise and just king, whereupon he becomes the king's loyal companion: a tamed wolf. Eventually, the werewolf encounters his former wife and her new lover, and he becomes uncharacteristically violent.⁴ The king deduces that the victims of the werewolf's violence must have done the wolf some wrong and deserved the attack; otherwise his well-behaved wolf would never have become violent. Thus the wicked plot is exposed, the werewolf is restored his humanity, and the king enacts justice on those deserving. The narrative arc of these stories mirror the romantic arc of hunting, or, more specifically, a romanticized arc of domestication: wilderness (symbolized by the forest and the wolf) is conquered, submits itself to

⁴ "Arthur and Gorlagon" is slightly different in this regard. Gorlagon witnesses the king's wife in bed with her seneschal, and it is their infidelity to his master that incites Gorlagon to violence.

human management, is protected and tended, and ultimately becomes a part of domestic, civilized space. These four stages map to four critical scenes of these werewolf stories: the hunt for the wolf, the humbling of the wolf, the daily life of the tamed wolf, and the unexpected act of violence that exposes the villain (which, I argue, demonstrates the depth of the king's trust in the tamed animal). By exploring each of these scenes in turn, we will see that the werewolves become more doggish and pet-like in their behaviors and in the ways in which they are treated, and the stories themselves increasingly draw upon the lore of dogs rather than the lore of wolves.

1. Hunting the werewolf

The medieval forest was the locale where civilization met wilderness, and as the primary activity at that boundary was the hunt, the hunt came to symbolize the interaction between human and beast. Historians John Aberth (2013) and Aleksander Pluskowski (2006) both argue that the medieval wilderness was a complex cultural space. Aberth notes that "a medieval forest reflected the complex intersection between the wild, untamed woods and the cultivated open space of the village" (87), and Pluskowski describes the medieval forest as an "environment at the fringes of human control, politically and economically, and as such is a place of both potential refuge and danger" (57). And while the forests were in part a legal construct—zones of land reserved by law for the king and his barons' use, particularly hunting—as Pluskowski notes, the forests' capacity for "refuge and danger" created an ideal cultural space in which the royal hunt could become romantic pageantry, where civilization encountered and conquered wilderness.

There are two salient features of the medieval wolf hunt that are important here. First, the wolf's status as game was fluid; most often it was considered vermin. Second, this status in turn

determined who could hunt the wolf and the technique used to hunt it. The wolf held no particular value in and of itself; even its fur was considered useless as popular wisdom held that the smell of the wolf could never be cleaned from it (Aberth 185). The wolf was hunted only because of the damage it did to livestock and more desirable game such as deer. Henry II's *Carta de Foresta* makes clear who can hunt wolves and where:

As for wolves, they are neither reckoned as beasts of the forest nor as beasts of venery, and therefore whoever kills them is out of all jeopardy of forfeiture—nevertheless, killing them within the limits of the forest is a breach of the royal chase, and therefore the offender shall yield a recompense. (Cited in Pluskowski 104)

"Beasts of the forest" and "beasts of venery" were legal categories of game. Excluded from those categories, a wolf could be hunted by anyone without fear of penalty (in practice a fine, though forest law imposed much harsher penalties as well), but only in certain areas: even a wolf could not be hunted lawfully in a royal forest. The wolf's status as vermin also determined the methods by which it could (or would) be hunted. Aberth explains that the "hunting of wolves was done with pits, nets, snares, poisoned and booby-trapped bait (containing tension-tied needles designed to pierce the wolf's intestines once swallowed whole), and with an assortment of traps" (184-5). Pluskowski additionally includes hunting from horseback with a retinue and hounds, called *par force* hunting, in his list of wolf-hunting techniques (98-101).⁵ *Par force* hunting was considered the most noble and chivalrous of techniques, so while it could be used to hunt wolves,

⁵ Pluskowski notes that while *par force* hunting of wolves was practiced in France, its omission from *Master of Game*, the English adaptation of Gaston Phoebus's French *Le Livre de la Chasse*, may indicate that it was not commonly practiced in England (101).

the wolf's status as vermin meant that wolves were undeserving of such pageantry. Nevertheless, in all three of our werewolf stories the werewolves are hunted *par force* by the king himself, the use of which carries significance beyond the ennobling of the king.

Bisclavret is commonly interpreted as a gentle werewolf, killing no one and eating only what he needs to survive. This interpretation is supported by the description of the hunt that finds him. The hunt is simply described in general terms, though mention of the stirrups on the king's horse (line 147), the hounds, and the retinue of hunters marks it as *par force*:

Until one day the king went hunting;

He headed right for the forest

Where Bisclavret was.

When the hounds were unleashed,

They ran across Bisclavret;

The hunters and the dogs

Chased him all day. (136-42)⁶

The description omits or delays what might seem to be important information. That the king is on horseback isn't mentioned until line 147 and then only mentioned indirectly. That he hunts with dogs isn't mentioned until line 139 when they are released. This suggests that the medieval audience did not need these cues but could assume that *par force* hunting was the standard for literary kings. Significantly, the king does not appear to be hunting Bisclavret from the start, but is likely pursuing more noble game such as deer or boar. The hunters discover [OFr.: *encuntré*] the werewolf only when the hounds are unleashed. This suggests that Bisclavret had not drawn

⁶ Tant que li reis ala chacier. / A la forest ala tut dreit / la u li Bisclavret esteit. / Quant li chien furent descuplé, / le Bisclavret unt encuntré. / A lui cururent tutejur / e li chien e li veneür

any attention to himself by engaging in traditional werewolf (or wolf-like) predation. He has not been preying on the villagers' livestock, poaching the king's deer, or, worse, eating people. When the king's hunting dogs set upon Bisclavret, we can presume that they do so only because of their training and opportunity, not because he has given the king reason to hunt him. The hunting framework established here permits the encounter between king and beast while its accidentalness allows Bisclavret to remain the gentle wolf rather than appear rapacious or criminal.

If the hunt for Bisclavret underscores the werewolf's gentility, then, by contrast, the hunts for Melion and Gorlagon show exactly the opposite, an important distinction among these stories. Neither of these wolves is gentle, and both begin a war of predation upon the people who trapped them in wolf form. In Melion's case, the titular werewolf chases his wicked wife to Ireland and wages a full-on war against her father, the Irish king.⁷ As the text indicates:

[Melion] went into a forest,
 And found cows and oxen there.
 He killed and strangled many of them;
 There he began his war. (253-56)⁸

As a result of Melion's attacks on the livestock in the forest, the people who live there petition the king to defend them against the wolf's depredations. The people's petition reflects a historical reality. Ireland's woodlands were also managed under Anglo-Norman royal forest law

⁷ See Boyd (2009) for an in-depth discussion of Melion's war and the possible influence of the Irish practice of "brigandage" on the lai.

⁸ En une forest est als, / Vaches et bues i a trovs. / Molt en ocit et estrangla; / Iluec sa guerre comencha.

(Aberth 125); and, as Melion makes his home in the king's forest, commoners cannot legally hunt him. Their only recourse is to petition to the king for aid. But the king of Ireland refuses to help his people defend against only one wolf—we are told the king “thought nothing” of Melion's attacks (266). The king's dismissive reaction marks him as neglectful. While not mentioned in the story, it is nevertheless clear that if the king had pursued Melion when his duty first required him to do so, rather than ignoring the plight of his people, much loss of life might have been averted because Melion, ignored, escalates his war. He recruits a pack of wolves to follow him and spends a full year killing “men and women / and ravaged all the land” (277-8), while the king, finally forced to act, pursues him unsuccessfully. The king's final hunt for Melion and his wolves is described at length. The detail of the description and the scale of the king's hunt reflect the level of menace Melion has achieved:

They [the king's barons] had the nets, which they used to capture boar
Stretched around the woods. (299-300)

...

They surrounded the wood completely,
For there were a great many people
Who carried axes and cudgels,
And some had naked swords.
Now there were a thousand excited hounds,
Which quickly found the wolves. (307-12)

...

The dogs went for them viciously
And they came fleeing into the nets.

All were cut to pieces and killed;
 Not a single one of them escaped alive,
 Save for Melion, who fled
 By leaping over the nets. (315-20)⁹

Here, the wolf hunt rises to the level of warfare. The king fields a virtual army equipped with swords, axes, and cudgels, and accompanied by a thousand hounds (six to twelve hounds were typical in a *par force* hunt). Yet despite the exaggerated scale of this hunt, the basic technique of using hunting assistants and dogs to herd the wolves into nets is historically accurate. Gorlagon's predations require a similar response. Like Melion, Gorlagon travels with a pack which is killed as the result of trapping (219). Unlike Melion's nemesis, the King of Ireland, however, when the king in "Gorlagon" finally hears of the wolf's attacks, he does not delay: "When the uncounted forays of the wolf against his men and cattle had been brought to [the king's] attention, he decided on a day on which he would undertake to track down and pursue the wolf with a retinue of hunters and dogs" (219).¹⁰ The king's prompt response and choice of a *par force* hunt illustrates his worthiness and chivalrous nature thus setting the stage for later when Gorlagon humbles himself before him.

⁹ Les rois dont soelent les pors prandre / Environ le bois ont fait tender.... (299-300)

Le bois ont tot avironé, / Car gent i ot a grant plenté / Ki portent haces et maques, / Et li alquant
 espees nues. / Adont i ot .M. chiens hués / Ki les leus orent tost trovés. (307-12)

Li chien les vont molt angoissant / Et il viennent as rois fuiant. / Tot sont detrancié et ocis; / Un
 tos seus n'en escapa vis / Fors Melion, qui escapa, / Par deseure les rois lança.... (315-320)

¹⁰ Cui dum innumerabiles strages, tam hominum quam pecudum a lupo illate, relate fuissent.

Diem statuit, qua ipsum cum uenatorum canumque copia indagare et prosequi aggrediretur.

All three of these stories portray historically accurate (though exaggerated) hunting techniques and use hunting laws to reinforce important aspects of the werewolves and their kings. That Bisclavret is found accidentally and not actively hunted, points toward his gentility, especially in contrast to Melion and Gorlagon. When the Irish king ignores the plea of his people to hunt the wolf that they cannot, he demonstrates his less-than-admirable virtue as a king (which will later be contrasted against Arthur's unquestionably admirable virtue). And "Gorlagon's" king shows his worth by heeding the plight of his people. Of course the werewolf cannot be hunted forever. All three werewolves ultimately realize that they cannot survive the hunt and will die unless they submit to the king and plead for his mercy.

2. The humbling of the werewolf

Cornered and exhausted, the werewolf Bisclavret runs to the king who hunts him and pleads for mercy by licking the king's feet. The king's response demonstrates understandable surprise at this turn of events; he exclaims:

“My lords,” he said, “come quickly!

Look at this marvel—

This beast is humbling itself to me.

It has the mind of a man, and it's begging me for mercy!" (151-54)¹¹

Melion performs a parallel act before King Arthur with similar results:

The king spoke thus: "I can see marvels!

This wolf has come here to me.

¹¹ «Seignur,» fet il, «avant venez / Et ceste merveille esgardez, / Cum ceste beste s'umilie! / Ele a sen d'ume, merci crie.»

Now know well that he is tame." (409-11)¹²

The humbling, or taming, of the wolf is so unbelievable that the marvel of it can only be explained by the wolf possessing "the mind of a man."¹³ The scene invokes two important twelfth-century touchstones: first, the commonplace lessons in bestiaries and other sources that it is impossible for a wolf to change its nature; second, the taming reflected in hagiographic stories where wild beasts humble themselves before saints. In the context of the werewolf stories under consideration here, the werewolf's humbling himself before the king demonstrates the king's worthiness, almost as a secular counterpart to hagiographical figures.

The wolf's inability to change its nature is a common motif in literature of the period. Bestiaries—early, popular, encyclopedia-like books that repeated classical animal lore and used animals as spiritual allegory—are unanimous in proclaiming the evil of the wolf. "The Devil has the nature of a wolf," the Aberdeen bestiary proclaims, "He always looks with an evil eye upon mankind and continually circles the sheepfold of the faithful of the Church" (folio 17r).¹⁴ The words "always" and "continually" signify the unchangeable nature of the wolf, and while it

¹² Ce dist li rois: «Merveilles voi! / Cis leus est ci venus a moi. / Or sachiés bien qu'il est privés.»

¹³ The term "marvel" (OF: *merveille*) is repeated several times in all three of these stories and is significant in twelfth-century writings, being closely connected to, though distinct from, the miraculous. For a discussion of the twelfth century's fascination with "marvels," which werewolves counted among, see Bynum (2001), chapter 1.

¹⁴ While the Aberdeen bestiary was produced much later than "Bisclavret" and "Melion," it draws upon source texts which predate the twelfth century: most notably Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* which in turn draws heavily upon Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*. The popular lore surrounding the wolf is largely unchanged from the classical to late medieval period.

might be easy to attribute this description to the religious allegory of the bestiary, the wolf's consistent characteristics of evil and violence nevertheless enter the public awareness through secular writings as well. Though written much later than our three werewolf stories, and intended (at least to some degree) to be a practical manual teaching how to properly hunt and how to care for hunting dogs, *Master of Game* echoes the bestiaries when it says that a wolf "will always do harm. . . he will never be so tame. . . . He knoweth well and woteth well that he doth evil, and therefore men ascrieth and hunteth and slayeth him. And yet for all that he may not leave his evil nature" (63). *Master of Game* explicitly declares the wolf untamable. In fables, too, supposed to represent the natural behavior of animals and men, the wolf balks at giving up his freedom. In Marie de France's fable "The Wolf and the Dog," the wolf meets a pet dog (we know he's a pet rather than a hunting dog because he says he spends his days laying around and eating) and accompanies it into town to join in on the pet's life of luxury and ease. But when the wolf sees that the dog wears a collar and chain, and the dog explains their meaning, the wolf returns to the woods, saying, "Ja chaène ne choisirai!" ["I will not choose the leash!"] (96). These three examples speak to different purposes: moral allegory, justification for the hunt, and cultural commentary on lawfulness versus outlawry. Yet their underlying assertion is the same: the wolf cannot change its ways. Given the choice between wilderness and civilization, the wolf refuses domestication even in the encyclopedic, "factual" literature of the Middle Ages. By contrast, a willingly submissive wolf such as Bisclavret, Melion, and Gorlagon, becomes a marvel comparable to a holy miracle.

Throughout hagiography, the submissiveness of animals (both wild and domesticated) signals the holiness of the saint. Pluskowski notes that "the induction of wolves to providing services, usually contrary to their nature" was a popular theme in early medieval hagiography

(167). One of the most popular stories of the tamed animal, widely represented in medieval painting, is that of St. Jerome and the lion. In this story, a lion enters Jerome's Bethlehem monastery where Jerome welcomes it as an honored guest. The lion shows Jerome its paw which has been cut by a thorn. Jerome tends the lion's cut and the lion becomes tame and remains thereafter in the monastery helping the monks with their chores. It's not surprising that similar English and Continental stories feature the wolf instead, a creature native (at least until hunted to extinction) in those lands. St. Brigit of Kildare, a fifth-century Irish saint, tames a wolf in order to replace the one mistakenly killed by a man who didn't realize it had been the king's pet, thereby saving the man's life from the king's retribution. And perhaps as early as the mid-thirteenth century, the story of St. Francis of Assisi and the Wolf of Gubbio begins to spread and gain popularity (Pluskowski 168). In this story, the village of Gubbio is being terrorized by a wolf. St. Francis approaches the wolf, scolds it for its wickedness, and invites it to join the village under the condition that it give up its evil ways. The wolf places its paw in Francis's hand to show its agreement and lives the remainder of its life among the villagers protecting them in exchange for being fed. These stories and others may have been familiar to the audiences of our werewolf stories, who may have seen the similarity between wolf and werewolf, saint and king. Of course, we are not to take these kings as saints, but the humbling of the werewolf before them, and the kings' display of mercy toward the werewolves, nevertheless implies an exceptional worthiness in the king. This is perhaps best illustrated in "Melion" where the werewolf regularly works to glorify King Arthur. After Melion's taming, Arthur arrives in Dublin to treat with the king of Ireland. During the procession into the city, Melion holds the skirt of Arthur's robe, and as the two kings dine together, Melion sits at Arthur's feet. Though the

text leaves it unstated, the possession of a tame wolf is a display of Arthur's power, all the more so because this is the very wolf that the king of Ireland was previously unable to capture.

"Gorlagon" differs significantly from "Bisclavret" and "Melion" in the wolf's taming. Though the king responds with wonder when Gorlagon licks at his feet (*miratus suis omnibus*, 221) just as the kings do in the other two stories, in "Gorlagon" the marvel of a tamed wolf is not enough to earn the king's mercy. When a stag crosses the road in front of the king's procession, the king tests Gorlagon and orders him to kill the stag.

The wolf, knowing well indeed how to take the prey, leaped forward and pursued the deer. Getting in front of it, he attacked it; and seizing the deer by the throat, he laid the carcass before the King.

Seeing this, the King called the wolf to himself and said, "Truly you should be kept and not killed, you who know how to perform such service to us." (221)¹⁵

The scene is reminiscent of popular debate poetry, like *The Owl and the Nightingale* (also a twelfth century poem), in which animals or even inanimate objects argue their importance based largely on the services they are able to perform for humans.¹⁶ And, indeed, "Arthur and Gorlagon" is considerably less sentimental than either "Bisclavret" or "Melion," and more utilitarian. Bisclavret and Melion are instantly loved and doted upon because of their marvelous

¹⁵ Lupus uero huius prede capiende non inscius, saltu dato ceruo insequitur, anticipat et inuadit, guttureque comprehensum ante regis obtuitus mortuum prosternit.

Quo facto rex eum reuocat, atque "Nempe seruandus es," ait, "non necandeus, qui talia scis nobis exhibere obsequia."

¹⁶ See, for instance, Thomas L. Reed Jr., *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution* (Columbia, MO: U Missouri Press, 1990).

tameness and civility. Gorlagon is spared only when he proves his value as a hunting dog. And indeed, from this point on in all three stories, the werewolf is not portrayed as a wolf except in name. Instead, he is portrayed and treated as if he were the most loyal of pets.

3. The care and feeding of the pet werewolf

In all these stories, from the moment of the werewolf's taming he is no longer portrayed as a wolf, but as a loyal dog. In fact, all three werewolves occupy the same social space as would a pet, behave as a pet might, and are treated as a pet might to the point of being pampered. This is shown most clearly in how the werewolves are fed and where they sleep. In her study of medieval pet-keeping, Kathleen Walker-Miekle notes how pet dogs and hunting dogs were fed differently, both in kinds of food and where they were fed. Pet dogs were typically given better quality food supplemented by table scraps, and often given milk to drink (41). Paintings of banquets and feasts during the period regularly include dogs beneath the tables. The practice of feeding dogs by hand beneath the table was so common that the twelfth-century scholar Albertus Magnus, in his encyclopedic *On Animals*, felt the need to condemn hand feeding, claiming it made for lazy dogs (1457). Albertus was himself an avid hunter and describes the proper diet for hunting dogs very precisely. Unlike pets, adult hunting dogs should be fed a diet of "bread softened with whey," and milk and butter should be restricted from their diet with the exception of pregnant females and puppies (1459). Hunting dogs were typically kept in kennels and fed there rather than at the master's table.

Although the feeding and care of Bisclavret is vague enough to resemble any valued domestic animal (we are told only that he is "well fed and watered," line 174), the feeding of Melion and Gorlagon is obviously that of the pampered pet dog. Melion's first feeding is

described at length (lines 422-438). Melion sits at Arthur's feet at the dining table, and Arthur feeds him bread and meat by his own hand. Finally, Arthur has "wine brought / Before the wolf in a basin. / The wolf saw it and drank some" (433-35).¹⁷ Gorlagon's king also feeds his wolf by hand and offers him wine. Gorlagon even performs tricks, begging for his food: "Every day he stood before the King at table, forepaws erect, sharing his bread and drinking from the same cup" (223).¹⁸ We're not told what the king's cup contains, but wine seems likely. Not surprisingly, no medieval encyclopedia or manual recommends wine as a drink for dogs, so it appears to be yet another marker of the werewolf's pampered status. Few things would point more toward pampered than being allowed to drink from the king's own cup, except, perhaps, being allowed to sleep in the king's bedchamber.

All three werewolves sleep at the foot of the king's bed, or at least nearby—Bisclavret sleeps "among the knights, near the king" (177); Melion sleeps at the foot of Arthur's bed (450); and Gorlagon, too, sleeps "beside the King's bed" (223)—strongly marking the werewolves as sharing the same cultural and physical space as a pet dog. As with dogs at the dinner table, again Walker-Miekle notes the common placement of a pet dog in artwork depicting the bedchamber (59). While the practice of allowing dogs in the bed was not condemned in the same way hand-feeding was, Walker-Miekle notes several stories of mistaken identity. In one, for example, a knight enters his mistress's bedchamber and sees a shape beneath the blankets. Believing the shape to be another man, he kills her, but upon throwing back the blanket finds that the "man"

¹⁷ Li rois fait aporter le vin / Devant le leu en .I. bacin. / Li leus le voit, beut en a

¹⁸ Cotidie ad prandium, prioribus erectis brachiis ante regem ad mensam stabat, de pane eius comedens, et de eodem calice bibens.

was in fact her pet dog (60).¹⁹ These stories (almost certainly untrue) carry the mildly admonitory, moralizing tone that suggests they are critical of the pet's pampering. Bisclavret is perhaps the least pampered of these werewolves. When Bisclavret sleeps among the knights, we are reminded that he is himself a knight and is merely sleeping where he might have slept as a human. Interestingly, the kings of "Melion" and "Gorlagon" do not invite the wolves into their bedchambers; the werewolves invite themselves. In Melion, we're told

When the king wanted to retire,
 He ordered his bed to be prepared;
 He went to sleep, he was very tired,
 And the wolf went with him;
 No-one could make him leave him;
 He went to lie at the king's feet. (445-50)²⁰

It's possible to read the werewolf's insistence on sleeping near the king as simple self-preservation, though in both cases the king has already extended the werewolf his protection and forbid anyone from harming him. But the fact that the wolf lays at the king's feet suggests that Melion self-identifies as a loyal pet dog, and in the king's bedchamber is the proper place for a faithful pet to lie. Precisely where the werewolves sleep—whether on the bed or at the foot of the bed—is somewhat vague in each of these stories. The emphasis is that Melion sleeps at the king's feet, symbolizing both his loyalty and favored status. Whether the werewolf occupied the

¹⁹ Dijon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 526.

²⁰ Qant li rois volt aler colchier, / Son lit rova apareillier. / Dormir s'en vait, molt est lassés, / Et li leus est od lui alés, / Ainc nel pot on de li partir, / As piés le roi en vait gesir. (442-50)

bed or not appears to be of subordinate concern and explicitly stated only when important to the plot as it is in "Gorlagon."

When, in "Gorlagon," the king must leave for a while, his queen begs him to force Gorlagon to sleep elsewhere for she fears "if the wolf lies beside me in his usual place, he will attack me in the night and leave me mangled" (223).²¹ The king refuses her request, but as a compromise has Gorlagon chained with a golden chain to the bed's ladder so that Gorlagon cannot get into the bed. The king's refusal of her request asserts Gorlagon's right to the bed is nearly as valid as the queen's own. Placing the tamed wolf in the bed where one expects a pampered pet is therefore the crucial recognition of these werewolves' doggishness, not only by others, but also in their self-identity as civilized pets.

The civility of these werewolves ultimately turns them from being thought of as wolves to being thought of as dogs. The civility is at first a "marvel" just as the werewolf's humbling was a marvel. Melion taking food from Arthur's hand causes Arthur to "marvel" (424), and attendant lords and knights call Melion "completely unnatural" (430) for a wolf and "well-mannered" (433). Bisclavret, too, is called "noble and well-behaved" (179). At the climax of these stories the marvel of the tame wolf is reversed and becomes disbelief that the tamed wolf

²¹ "Si solito loco iaceat, me nocte unuadat, cruentamque me relinquat." The queen's fear of sleeping near Gorlagon is reminiscent of the fear shown by Bisclavret's wife upon learning her husband is a werewolf: "The lady turned scarlet from fear; / she was terrified of the whole adventure / ... she never wanted to sleep with him again" (98-9, 102). The Old French verb *gesir* (to sleep) is similar to the modern usage of *coucher* and can carry the same implication of sexual relations. So while the queen fears being mauled by the wolf, she and Bisclavret's wife could also fear a sexual attack.

could ever behave in an uncivilized way; and, once again, the lore of dogs provides important context for these scenes.

4. The unexpected violence of the pet werewolf

At the end of each of these werewolf stories, the werewolf unexpectedly attacks a member of the king's court, and just as the taming of the wolf reenacts popular stories in the lives of some saints, the werewolf's unexpected violence reenacts a popular story about dogs found in several bestiaries and ethnographies. This context allows us to see how domestic these werewolves have become and demonstrates that these stories clearly are as much about dogs as wolves. In "Bisclavret," at a banquet the werewolf sees the knight who co-conspired with Bisclavret's wife to trap him in wolf form. Bisclavret attacks the knight much to everyone's surprise, as up to that point the wolf had been the very model of civility and well-manneredness. Shortly thereafter, Bisclavret sees his former wife and attacks her as well. The king's advisers note that the two victims of Bisclavret's attacks are married to each other and so deduce that the two must have done the wolf some injustice to make him so uncharacteristically violent. Onlookers muse "that [Bisclavret] wouldn't act that way without a reason: / that somehow or other, the knight had mistreated Bisclavret, / and now he wanted his revenge" (208-210).²² The wife is then tortured until she confesses to stealing Bisclavret's clothes thereby trapping him in his wolf form. In "Melion," at a banquet with Arthur and the Irish king, Melion finds and attacks the squire who ran off with his wife (who happens to be the Irish king's daughter). As with Bisclavret, courtiers interpret Melion's violence as rooted in a rational cause. Yder says of the squire whom Melion attacked: "If the wolf had not hated him, he would not have touched him"

²² «Qu'il nel fet mie senz raisun, / mesfait li a, coment que seit, / kar volentiers se vengereit.»

(505).²³ Although Yder does not explicitly state that the wolf's cause must be just and rational, it is nevertheless implied as Arthur then turns to the wounded squire and says, "'You will confess / Why he seized you or you shall die at once'" (509-10).²⁴ The squire then confesses, as does the Irish king's daughter. For Arthur, Melion is so unquestionably loyal and chivalrous a wolf that any apparent bad behavior must be the cause of someone else.

The climax of "Gorlagon" follows the same general pattern of the loyal "dog" revealing a hidden injustice. While Gorlagon's king is away, the queen takes her seneschal to her bed. Gorlagon witnesses the infidelity, becomes enraged, breaks his golden chain, and attacks the seneschal, wounding him. To cover their crime the queen hides her infant child and concocts a lie for when her husband the king returns. She tells him that Gorlagon killed the infant, and the seneschal was injured when he tried to defend the child. Yet as she tells this story, Gorlagon is "prancing about with joy" (225) at the king's return. Struck by the inconsistency between his wife's story and the wolf's behavior,

The king, distracted by conflicting emotions, was in doubt about what he should do. On one hand, reflecting that his wife had never revealed a desire to deceive him; on the other, that if the wolf had been guilty of so great a crime against him, he would not have dared to meet him with such joyful bounds. (225)²⁵

²³ «S'il nel haïst, nel touchast pas.»

²⁴ «Tu jehiras / Porcoi t'a pris ou ja morras.»

²⁵ Rex per diuersa mente distractus quid ageret dubitabat, hinc suam coniugem sibi reputans falsa nolle proferre illinc tanto in se commisso facinore, lupum sibi cum tanto tripudio, procul dubio non audere occurrere.

The king expects the wolf to behave as a dog and make some display of shame for having done something wrong. In fact, the king's expectation of doglike behavior is so strong that Gorlagon's honesty challenges that of the queen, leaving the king unable to decide whom he trusts more. Eventually, Gorlagon leads the king to the hidden prince, the king and Gorlagon confront the seneschal, and the story aligns again with the resolutions seen in "Bisclavret" and "Melion": Gorlagon attacks the seneschal, and the king threatens to torture the seneschal until the wicked plot is exposed. In a rather remarkable display of insight, the king concludes from this chain of events:

that a being [Gorlagon] who was clearly endowed with such great intelligence must have the understanding of a man.... And you [the king's advisers] must understand the one who avenged so severely the injury against me to be a human being, without doubt to been a person of great wisdom and ability, and further, to have been clothed in the form of a wolf by some spell or transmutation. (229)²⁶

Not only are the wolf's actions signs of human intelligence and a wonder to behold, but they are also so unbelievable that they can only be the product of magic.

But, in fact, these scenes do not require the werewolf to have the mind of a man, and none of these behaviors were necessarily unbelievable to a medieval audience informed by dog lore. The medieval reader would have recognized these displays of intelligence immediately as the familiar acts of loyal dogs, already popularized in many written sources. One story that reappears in several bestiaries as well as in Gerald of Wales's *Itinerary Through Wales* is the

²⁶ Asserens illum humanum sensum habere cui tantam intelligenciam constiterit inesse.... Et qui meam niuriam tanta seueritate ultus est hominem esse et magne sagacitatis et potencie procul dubio fuisse sciatic, atque aliqua incantacione uel transmutacione lupinam formam induisse.

story of the dog whose master is murdered, then later points out the murderer by finding and attacking only him from a large crowd which has gathered around. The story is similar to "Bisclavret" and "Melion" not only in its plot but also in the onlookers' attribution of reason to the dog's outburst of violence. Gerald explains that the dog's attack "was considered as a proof against the murderer, that the dog seized him from amongst so many, and would not let him go; and especially, as neither the crime of hatred, envy or injury, could possibly, in this case, be urged against the dog" (64). The underlying assumption in Gerald's story is that no dog would perform random violence, but must have a cause. (A wolf, on the other hand, requires no cause; it is driven by its nature to violence.) Moreover, dogs are presumably incapable of the baser emotions that might motivate a human to violence, such as hate, envy, or the desire to injure. Consequently the dog becomes a vehicle for justice, and indeed in Gerald's version of the story the dog's attack is such a strong accusation that a trial by combat is ordered: the murderer versus the dog. The dog wins the combat and the murderer is executed.

This often-told story provides the basis for the climax of our three werewolf stories. Underlying all these scenes is the belief that the wolf's loyalty and morality has become dog-like and now beyond reproach, an assumption that reflects other literature of the period. Bestiaries and the etymologies from which they evolved, travel writings such as those written by Gerard of Wales and Gervase of Tilbury, and academic works such as those by Albertus Magnus and Neckam all repeat stories of dogs' exceptional loyalty. Although "Gorlagon" differs slightly, the additional act of finding the hidden infant is hardly an impossible feat for a dog. Gorlagon has already shown his skill at hunting, and tracking the missing infant is simply another aspect of that. The modern reader cannot help but think of Gorlagon as a medieval Lassie. Clearly, the explanation for the civilized and intelligent behavior of these werewolves does not require the

werewolf to have the mind of a man, only for the werewolf to have the mind of a domesticated, loyal dog. But more, what these werewolves demonstrate is that the separation between the mind of the loyal dog and the mind of the chivalrous courtier is slim indeed.

Wolf Minds in Wolf Bodies; Wolf Minds in Human Bodies.

When Bisclavret humbles himself before the king, the king declares, "It has the mind of a man" (154). The narrator of "Melion" tells us that Melion "retained the reason and memory of a man" (218). And the magic spell that Gorlagon's wife misspeaks is, "'Be a wolf! Be a wolf... Have the mind of a man!'" (217) All three stories stress the human mind trapped in the wolf's body. Yet, as I've shown in the previous section, "the mind of a man" is remarkably similar to the "mind of a loyal dog." The emphasis these stories (and modern scholars) place on these werewolves' human minds obscures the wolf-like and dog-like behaviors they display. And the emphasis on the wolf, rather than the dog, obscures the lack of distinction these stories make between the loyal dog and chivalrous courtier. In fact, several scenes demonstrate that the mind within these werewolves is only ambivalently human.

In part, the ambivalence of the werewolf's mind arises from the pervasive anthropomorphic qualities assigned to dogs (then as now). One example of this can be found in the passage where Melion gathers a wolf pack around him. We're told

That [Melion] was joined by ten wolves;
He coaxed and persuaded them so much
That he took them with him

And they did all he wished. (267-272)²⁷

The phrase "coaxed and persuaded" [OFr.: *blandi et losenga*] suggests a linguistic capability in the wolves, a capability supposedly limited to humans alone; one that is, in fact, a defining characteristic of being human. Notably, that phrase, *blandi et losenga*, is used later in the story when the king of Ireland urges his daughter to confess (530). Melion communicates to the same effect as the king, even though Melion is wolf. This kind of anthropomorphism was common in literature of the period even outside romances and fables. For example, the hunting manual *Master of Game* says that hunting dogs on the chase are "making great melody in their language and saying great villainy and chiding the beasts that they chase" (110). The same manual later describes the proper training of young hunters and states that the child should be "well advised of his speech and of his terms, and ever glad to learn and that he be no boaster nor jangler" (124). The word *jangler* is also used in reference to dogs that bark too much: "Other kind of hounds there be the which open and jangle when they are uncoupled... and if they learn the habit when they are young and are not chastised thereof, they will evermore be noisy and wild (110-11). The same language is used to describe the behavior of both children and dogs, as if for all practical purposes children and dogs could be viewed as much the same thing. Especially in the world depicted in romances where the laws of nature and philosophy are fluid, anthropomorphism closes the boundary between human and animal. Melion may be able to coax and persuade because he has a human mind, but other wolves must understand the language he "speaks" in order to be persuaded, and a significant barrier between human and animal is weakened thereby.

²⁷ Que a .X. leus s'acompaigna: / Tant les blandi et losenga / Que avoec lui les a menés, / Et font totes ses volentés.

Yet anthropomorphism is not the only factor contributing to the blurring of the human-animal mind. The wolf packs themselves are only ambivalently wolf-like.

Melion's pack is at least a logical development of his story; he is at war with the king of Ireland, after all, and needs an army. Gorlagon's pack is rather more surprising. We are told that

The wolf [Gorlagon] remained for two years deep in the forest where he had fled; he mated with a wild she-wolf and bred two cubs by her. Yet, not forgetting the evil done him by his wife, as he still bore his human understanding, he considered very carefully in what way he might take revenge on her. (217, 219)²⁸

The information that Gorlagon has mated with a wolf and has two cubs—a decidedly non-human and entirely wolf-like thing to do—is followed almost immediately by the reminder that he still has "human understanding." Oddly, what indicates this human understanding is that he has not forgotten his need for revenge [Lat.: *ulcisci*], as if revenge were a capacity found only among humans. We are given no reason why Gorlagon has chosen to take a mate and start a lupine family and are left to imagine what might have driven him to such non-human behavior.

Regardless of how human Gorlagon's mind may be, it is evident that it is no longer *only* human.

Both Melion and Gorlagon lose their packs in their war and their vengeance, and this loss traumatizes the protagonists, showing a care for their lupine companions far exceeding the loss of a utilitarian animal (such as the loss a knight might feel upon the death of his horse). Melion flees to the mountains and is "very unhappy and troubled / about his wolves, which he had lost"

²⁸ Lupus, uero, interiores liuas, ad quas fugerat, per beinnium frequentans, se lupe agresti coniunxit. Duosque ex illa catulos progenuit. Qui non immemor nequicie sibi a sua coniuge illate, ut ille cui humanus inerat animus, anxie cogitabat, si aliquo modo, se de ea ulcisci ualeat. (216, 218)

(333-4). Gorlagon's mate and cubs are trapped and killed, and Gorlagon, who is relating his own story to Arthur though Arthur (and the reader) does not yet know this, says he was "torn with great grief for the loss of his cubs and maddened because of the enormity of his sorrow" (219). Both texts stress that the werewolf retains his human mind after the transformation, yet Melion builds a wolf pack as any strong wolf might be expected to do, and Gorlagon takes a wolf mate who bears him two pups, and both mourn their losses profoundly. These are clearly the behaviors of wolves, but also metaphorically the behaviors one might imagine of displaced knights forced into outlawry: Melion gathers "bandits" around him to harass the subjects of the noble who has done him wrong (the bandit-as-wolf metaphor being common in legal documents of the time),²⁹ and Gorlagon builds a family to replace the one that has betrayed him. Melion's grief seems commensurate with the grief a leader might feel upon the loss of his warriors; Gorlagon's grief, commensurate with the loss of one's family. Gorlagon responds to the loss of his lupine family with a killing spree. The deaths of his cubs only increase his need for vengeance: a human response to a lupine loss.³⁰ In the werewolves' creation of a pack and their grief upon their loss we see further ambivalence in the human/wolf differentiation and the first cracks in the "mind of a man" these creatures purportedly possess.

²⁹ See Pluskowski, pages 185-190.

³⁰ Pluskowski describes a method of wolf-hunting called "denning" in which a wolf's den was located and the cubs found there killed. Not only did this control population, but the death of wolf cubs was known to destroy pack cohesion (101). "Gorlagon" illustrates the complicated (and conflicted) space in which animals existed. The killing of Gorlagon's cubs is an event intended to engender sympathy, yet the killing of wolf cubs was simultaneously an accepted practice for controlling wolf population.

This ambivalence persists in all three texts even after the werewolf's humanity is restored. Both Bisclavret and Gorlagon retain signs of their time as wolves. When Bisclavret's clothes are returned to him, "he didn't even seem to notice them" (280). An advisor explains to the king that Bisclavret will not put them on in public because he is ashamed, though what exactly Bisclavret might be ashamed of is left unstated.³¹ In his essay on "Bisclavret," Jeffrey Cohen takes issue with the advisor's explanation and proposes instead that Bisclavret has learned "the equivalence between two forms [human and wolf] that seemed mutually exclusive, learn[ed] their indifference" (356). My interpretation of Bisclavret's ambivalence compliments Cohen's assessment of the werewolf's indifference, and, indeed, more can be said about this scene in Cohen's support. When the courtiers open the doors of the king's bedchambers, "on the king's royal bed / they found the knight asleep" (298-99).³² Cohen reads Bisclavret's strangely-timed nap as a "sad" return to "dreary" humanity (356). But while Bisclavret may not find his newly-recovered humanity particularly exciting, we should remember that Bisclavret's lycanthropy is not a curse that can be permanently lifted, but his natural state; and, as we are told at the beginning of the lai, his human form never lasts more than a few days. By stealing his clothes, Bisclavret's human form can be stolen; but his wolf form cannot be taken away. More than

³¹ In "Melion," when Arthur is about to turn Melion back into a human with the aid of a magic ring, Gawain stops him and implores Arthur to undo the curse in private "so that he is not shamed in front of people" (542). Strangely, the transformation doesn't occur in private, however, as Arthur invites Yder and Gawain to witness it (543-4). Nevertheless, Melion's shame makes more sense than Bisclavret's: where Bisclavret would have been human and clothed, Melion would have been human and naked.

³² Sur le demeine lit al rei / truevent dormant le chevalier.

dreary, however, it might seem odd, perhaps even a touch presumptuous, of the knight to fall asleep on the king's bed unless one has read Bisclavret as a well-trained dog. As a wolf Bisclavret slept among the knights as if he was human; as a human he sleeps on the king's bed as if he was a dog. For Bisclavret to sleep there now is nothing more than one might expect of a dog told to go to his room. Even as a man, Bisclavret appears to still inhabit his life as a dog.

Gorlagon, too, retains preferences for his life as an animal. At the end of Gorlagon's tale, he confesses to Arthur "You will recognize in me that wolf" (233). The statement confesses that the werewolf of Gorlagon's story is Gorlagon himself, but it also indicates that vestiges of the wolf remain for Arthur to see long after the enchantment was broken. When Gorlagon describes his transformation back into a man he says, "The wolf become a man as he had been before, though far more handsome and elegant, being now possessed of such grace that one could perceive at once that he was a man of great nobility" (233).³³ This is a private bit of good-natured braggadocio (private because Arthur does not yet know that Gorlagon and the werewolf are the same person); nevertheless, taken at face value, the comment suggests that Gorlagon possesses something kept from his days as a werewolf: an ennobling grace. Wolves are not admired for their grace in bestiaries or hunting manuals and are never considered noble, but greyhounds are. And it's not just that the man and his beast form share the same qualities. Instead, I argue that his life as a pet dog has ennobled him and made the difference between the man "as he had been before" and the "far more handsome and elegant" one. After all, of all the werewolves Gorlagon was most pet-like, performing tricks for his food, drinking from his

³³ Fit homo ut ante fuerat, licet longe pulcrior atque decencior, tanta iam uenustate preditus ut eciam ab inicio uir magne nobilitatis deprehenderetur.

master's cup, and demonstrating his loyalty by exposing the queen's infidelity—a crime done not to him, but to his liege.

But Gorlagon has kept one other animalistic quality, albeit one not quite so complimentary: the wolf's appetite. An insatiable, greedy hunger is the traditional vice of the wolf, a characteristic the animal shared across cultures. Isidore of Seville notes that wolves are often hungry and eat ravenously; the Norse god Oðinn is said to be accompanied by two wolves, Geri and Freki, whose names both mean "greedy ones"; and, more closely to our period and more relevant to our subject, St. Francis forgives the crimes of the Wolf of Gubbio because he knows the wolf's evil was driven by hunger.³⁴ While Arthur listens to Gorlagon relate his story, Gorlagon eats continually and invites Arthur to join him twelve times. Arthur's refusals allude to how much food Gorlagon consumes over the course of the story. Arthur asks Gorlagon to have the table removed as "so many dishes being put upon the table interrupts our conversation" (225) and then later responds to yet another invitation with "If you are not tired of eating, it should not trouble you if I fast a little longer" (227). Both comments imply that Gorlagon's banquet is uncommonly large and extensive: a meal for a wolf, not for a man. When Gorlagon suggests that Arthur will "recognize in me that wolf," what Arthur recognizes is the wolf's insatiable hunger.

These scenes in which human-like and wolf-like characteristics cross the boundaries of the physical form demonstrate the half-truthfulness of the werewolf's "mind of a man." Bisclavret has always been a werewolf and remains a werewolf even after his clothes are

³⁴ Isidore discusses the wolf in Book XII.2.23 of the *Etymologies* (page 235 of the Barney, et. al. edition). For a discussion of Oðinn's association with wolves, see Pluskowski (2006), pages 155-74. For the story of St. Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio, see *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi*, Chapter XXI.

returned; Melion behavior as a wolf is simultaneously human-like and wolf-like; and Gorlagon, like Bisclavret, retains animal behaviors even once his curse is lifted and his human form restored. If part of the purpose of the werewolf story is to challenge the human-animal binary and then re-establish that binary, thereby re-enacting the difference between human and animal, then these three werewolf stories appear to fail in that purpose. If the binary is restored, it is only restored on the surface (just as our werewolves are only physically restored to human form but psychologically retain something of the wolf).

The "failure" occurs because these werewolves are only partly wolves; they are also pet dogs. As we've seen, the well-behaved wolf is remarkably like the well-behaved dog; and, as Cohen notes, the well-behaved dog is remarkably like the ideal knight: "full of proper submission, but also ready to unleash proper violence" (356). Bisclavret, Melion, and Gorlagon spend much of their time as loyal, devoted pets and by the end of their stories become violent only when appropriate. The identification between the well-behaved dog and the ideal knight is not only a modern observation, but also a twelfth-century one. In her essay on the association between hunting dogs and the knighthood, Sophia Menache argues that as hunting became "attached to the noble virtues of courage and bravery, supposedly characterizing... the knighthood," the hunting dog became "a symbol of the knightly class" by virtue of its close association with hunting (51-52). Essentially, knights, hunting dogs, and hunting itself became equivalent symbols of one another. With that relationship in mind, we can see that "Bisclavret," "Melion," and "Gorlagon" are not merely werewolf stories; but are also stories about chivalrous knights, their growing association with their loyal dogs, and the pastime of hunting that bound them together.

Conclusion

Without question, hunting provides a useful metaphor and framework for reading these stories. By focusing on hunting, the prey of the hunt, and the dogs so closely associated with the hunt, we see that these stories reflect and partake of a wide range of medieval writings. These stories themselves are as hybrid as their subjects, being part hagiography, part parable, part bestiary, part hunting manual, and part ethnography. The hunt for the werewolf reflects both the romantic ideal of the knight and actual historical practice. The humbling of the werewolf before the king reflects the stories of wild animals humbling themselves before saints. The life of the werewolf in court reflects the historical life of cherished pets. And the werewolf's unexpected violence at the end of these stories reflects a commonly-told story about the loyalty of dogs. The overall narrative that unites these four motifs is the hunt: itself a metaphor of domestication wherein wilderness is tamed and brought into the home even so far as the privileged space of the bedchamber.

More than showing that these stories exist at an intersection of genres, however, my reading shows that these stories reflect the real, historical relationships between humans and animals, particularly dogs. These werewolves that supposedly possess the "mind of a man" nevertheless exhibit behaviors more dog-like than human-like (or wolf-like). The doting favor the kings and courtiers of these stories show the werewolves—feeding them by hand from the table, offering them wine from the king's own cup, allowing them to sleep at the foot of the bed, and trusting that their violence has a just cause, even over the word of one's wife—reflects a culture where pet-keeping was growing more common and where the knighthood was increasingly associated with their hunting dogs. When the werewolf's behavior is human-like, it

is often ambivalently so, and draws comparison between the well-behaved dog and the ideal courtier.

By replacing the werewolf's duality with dog/human instead of wolf/human, these stories close the very gap between animal and human that the werewolf story is supposed to reinforce. One could argue that this heightens the effectiveness of these werewolf stories since the safety of separation is never regained. Bisclavret, after all, is always a werewolf, and Gorlagon's hunger never abates. Yet it seems to me that these stories pose a different kind of problem in the division between human and animal, one more related to the keeping of companion animals. The eyes gleaming from the faces of Bisclavret, Melion, and Gorlagon, cannot be classified as human, wolf, or dog, because these hybridized characters represent all three at once and refuse to admit a clear distinction among man, wild animal, and domestic pet. In the end, these stories are not about the horrors of losing one's humanity as werewolf stories often are. Instead "Bisclavret," "Melion," and "Gorlagon" are stories about the uncanniness every dog-owner has experienced when they looked into the eyes of their pet and did not know what exactly—something human, or something animal—looked back.

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